

The bill amends s. 320.60(14), F.S., to revise the term “line-make vehicles” to provide an exception that motor vehicles sold or leased under multiple brand names or marks constitute a single line-make when: (1) they are included in single franchise agreement; and (2) every motor vehicle dealer in Florida authorized to sell or lease any such vehicles has been offered the right to sell or lease all of the multiple brand names or marks covered by the single franchise agreement. However, such multiple brand names or marks shall be considered individual franchises for purposes of s. 320.64(36), F.S.

The bill amends s. 320.6992, F.S., to provide for the application of ss. 320.60-320.70, F.S., including any amendments to ss. 320.60-320.70, F.S., to all existing or subsequently established systems of distribution of motor vehicles in the state unless such application would impair valid contractual agreements in violation of the State or Federal Constitution. All agreements amended subsequent to October 1, 1988, are governed by ss. 320.60-320.70, F.S., including any amendments to ss. 320.60-320.70, F.S., which have been or may be from time to time adopted unless the amendment specifically provides otherwise, except to the extent that such application would impair valid contractual agreements in violation of the State Constitution or Federal Constitution.

This bill substantially amends ss. 320.60 and 320.6992 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Florida has substantially regulated the relationship between motor vehicle manufacturers and motor vehicle dealers since 1970. Manufacturers, distributors, and importers (collectively referred to as licensees) enter into contractual agreements with franchised motor vehicle dealers to sell particular vehicles (or line-make) that they manufacture, distribute, or import. Chapter 320, F.S., provides, in part, for the regulation of the franchise relationship.

Current law defines “agreement” or “franchise agreement” to mean a contract, franchise, new motor vehicle franchise, sales and service agreement, or dealer agreement or any other terminology used to describe the contractual relationship between a manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or importer, and a motor vehicle dealer, pursuant to which the motor vehicle dealer is authorized to transact business pertaining to motor vehicles of a particular line-make.¹

A “franchised motor vehicle dealer” is defined as “any person engaged in the business of buying, selling, or dealing in motor vehicles or offering or displaying motor vehicles for sale at wholesale or retail, or who may service and repair motor vehicles pursuant to an agreement as defined in s. 320.60(1).”²

Section 320.60(14), F.S., defines “line-make vehicles” as those motor vehicles which are offered for sale, lease, or distribution under a common name, trademark, service mark, or brand name of the manufacturer of same.

¹ Section 320.60(1), F.S.

² Section 320.27(1)(c)1., F.S.

The requirements regulating the business relationship between franchised motor vehicle dealers and licensees by the DHSMV are primarily in ss. 320.60-320.070, F.S., (the Florida Automobile Dealers Act).³ These sections of law specify, in part:

- The conditions and situations under which the DHSMV may deny, suspend, or revoke a license;
- The process, timing, and notice requirements for licensees wanting to discontinue, cancel, modify, or otherwise replace a franchise agreement with a dealer, and the conditions under which the DHSMV may deny such a change;
- The procedures a licensee must follow if it wants to add a dealership in an area already served by a franchised dealer, the protest process, and the DHSMV's role in these circumstances;
- Amounts of damages that can be assessed against a licensee in violation of Florida statutes; and
- The DHSMV's authority to adopt rules to implement these sections of law.

Section 320.6992, F.S., provides this act [Florida Automobile Dealers Act] shall apply to all presently existing or hereafter established systems of distribution of motor vehicles in this state, except to the extent that such application would impair valid contractual agreements in violation of the State Constitution or Federal Constitution. The provisions of this act shall not apply to any judicial or administrative proceeding pending as of October 1, 1988. All agreements renewed or entered into subsequent to October 1, 1988, shall be governed hereby.

The DHSMV recently held, in an administrative proceeding, amendments to the Florida Automobile Dealers Act do not apply to dealers having franchise agreements which were signed prior to the effective date of the amendment. *Motorsports of Delray, LLC v. Yamaha Motor Corp., U.S.A.*, Case No. DMV-09-0935 (Fla. DOAH 2009). The Petitioner appealed the final order to the First District Court of Appeal, but ultimately voluntarily dismissed the appeal.

In this holding, the DHSMV ruled the 2006 amendment to the Florida Automobile Dealers Act which requires that if a dealer's franchise agreement is terminated the manufacturer must buyback from the dealer its unsold vehicles, parts, signs, special tools, and other items, does not apply to a dealer terminated in 2008 because the dealer's franchise agreement was entered into prior to the effective date of the amendment.

The DHSMV has indicated it will be applying this holding to every amendment to the Florida Automobile Dealers Act. That means dealers have different protections under the law depending on when they signed their franchise agreement.

³*Motor Vehicle Dealer and Motor Vehicle Manufacturers: Florida Reacts to Pressures in the Marketplace*, Walter E. Forehand and John W. Forehand, available online here: <http://www.law.fsu.edu/journals/lawreview/downloads/293/Forehand.pdf>, No section of the statute provides a short title; however, some courts have referred to the provisions as such. See *Mike Smith Pontiac, GMC, Inc. v. Mercedes-Benz of N. Am., Inc.*, 32 F.3d 528, 529 (11th Cir. 1994). But see *Meteor Motors, Inc. v. Hyundai Motor Am. Corp.*, No. 97-8820-Civ., 1999 WL 1800074, at 12 (S.D. Fla. Mar. 9, 1999) (using the "Florida Motor Vehicle Dealer Protection Act") (emphasis added).

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill amends s. 320.60(14), F.S., to revise the term “line-make vehicles” to provide an exception that motor vehicles sold or leased under multiple brand names or marks constitute a single line-make when: (1) they are included in single franchise agreement; and (2) every motor vehicle dealer in Florida authorized to sell or lease any such vehicles has been offered the right to sell or lease all of the multiple brand names or marks covered by the single franchise agreement. However, such multiple brand names or marks shall be considered individual franchises for purposes of s. 320.64(36), F.S.

The bill amends s. 320.6992, F.S., to provide for the application of ss. 320.60-320.70, F.S., including any amendments to ss. 320.60-320.70, F.S., to all existing or subsequently established systems of distribution of motor vehicles in the state unless such application would impair valid contractual agreements in violation of the State or Federal Constitution. All agreements amended subsequent to October 1, 1988, are governed by ss. 320.60-320.70, F.S., including any amendments to ss. 320.60-320.70, F.S., which have been or may be from time to time adopted unless the amendment specifically provides otherwise, except to the extent that such application would impair valid contractual agreements in violation of the State Constitution or Federal Constitution.

IV. Constitutional Issues:**A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

To the extent the agreements between dealers and motor vehicle manufacturers, distributors, and importers change due to compliance with existing laws, the parties may be positively or negatively impacted.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The DHSMV already regulates this industry, so the additional grounds proposed in the bill for regulatory actions should result in no additional state impact.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

CS by Transportation on March 9, 2011:

- Redefines the term “line-make vehicles” to clarify circumstances under which vehicles sold or leased under multiple brand names or marks constitute a single line-make; and specifies such multiple brand names or marks shall be considered individual franchises for purposes of s. 320.64(36), F.S.
- Provides an exception to the application of ss. 320.60 – 320.70, F.S., on all amended agreements to the extent that such application would impair valid contractual agreements in violation of the State Constitution or Federal Constitution.

B. Amendments:

None.